

## Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PM-04 NSC-05

SP-02 SS-15 CU-02 DHA-02 MCT-01 /049 W

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1868

INFO PANCANAL

USCINCSO

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PN

SUBJECT: STUDENT COMPLAINTS

SUMMARY: SEVERAL RECENT INCIDENTS TESTIFY TO STUDENT UNREST AND FRUSTRATION. ISSUES VARY FROM EDUCATION REFORM TO CLASSROOM EQUIPMENT BUT ARE LESS IMPORTANT THAN THE RISE IN POLITICAL TEMPERATURE THESE PROTESTS SEEK TO EFFECT. END SUMMARY.

1. DURING THE PAST TWO WEEKS STUDENT RESTIVENESS HAS PUBLICLY SURFACED ON THREE OCCASIONS: TWICE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PANAMA AND ONCE IN CATIVA (COLON SUBURB). THE ISSUES BEING PROTESTED ON ALL THREE OCCASIONS HAVE BEEN INTRAMURAL RATHER THAN POLITICAL: OVERCROWDED CLASSROOMS, STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL GOVERNMENT, ETC. THE TONE OF PROTEST, HOWEVER, APPEARS TO BE MORE BITTER, CRITICISM OF UNIVERSITY AND GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES MORE BLUNT.

2. WHILE PROTEST IN THE UNIVERSITY HAS BEEN VOCAL, THERE WAS A RELATIVELY SERIOUS PHYSICAL CONFRONTATION BETWEEN STUDENTS AND THE NATIONAL GUARD (GN) IN CATIVA WHERE ON MAY 6 APPROXIMATELY 1,000 STUDENTS OF THE

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PROFESSIONAL-TECHNICAL SCHOOL BLOCKED TRAFFIC ON THE PANAMA-COLON HIGHWAY FOR TWO HOURS. STUDENTS PROTESTED THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION'S FAILURE TO DELIVER ON A NEW SCHOOL BUILDING AND EQUIPMENT PROMISED LAST YEAR. THEIR DEMONSTRATION WAS BROKEN UP BY GN UNITS WIELDING RUBBER HOSES PLUS THE AID OF TEAR GAS AFTER A ROCK-THROWING SPREE IN WHICH AT LEAST TWO GUARDIA AND A FEW STUDENTS

WERE INJURED.

3. GN ZONE COMMANDER CLOSED COLON SCHOOLS FOR TWO DAYS. THE ACTING EDUCATION MINISTER MET WITH STUDENTS AT THE SCHOOL ON MAY 10, BUT STUDENTS DEMANDED TO SEE A HIGHER GOP AUTHORITY. STUDENTS SAY THEY WILL BOYCOTT CLASSES UNTIL MAY 16, WHEN THEY WILL TRY TO ORGANIZE A GENERAL STUDENT STRIKE IN ALL COLON SCHOOLS.

4. THE TWO PROTESTS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF PANAMA HAVE BEEN MARKED BY ACRID EXCHANGES OF INSULTS AND ACCUSATIONS, BUT SO FAR BY NO VIOLENCE. AT ISSUE IN LARGE MEASURE, IN BOTH THE FACULTIES OF LAW AND HUMANITIES IS THE PERENNIAL QUESTION OF STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION AND POLICY MAKING (CO-GOBIERNO). THE QUESTION DATES BACK TO DECREE 144 OF THE EDUCATION REFORM WHICH SUPPOSEDLY STRUCK DOWN THIS PRINCIPLE. (IN FACT IT OPERATES--ABYSMALLY--IN THE UNIVERSITY'S LARGEST FACULTY: PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND COMMERCE.)

5. IN THE LAW FACULTY THE IMPENDING RETIREMENT OF THE DEAN HAS SERVED TO RENEW CALLS FOR A CHANGE IN THE WAY THE SCHOOL IS ADMINISTERED. CO-GOBIERNO IS THE CRY IN THE HUMANITIES FACULTY TOO, PLUS CHARGES THAT FACILITIES ARE RUN-DOWN AND INADEQUATE (COMMENT: TRUE), AS WELL AS OTHER "ENVIRONMENTAL" GRIPEs. AN ASSEMBLY OF THE HUMANITIES STUDENTS ON MAY 4 NOT ONLY CASTIGATED THE PERFORMANCE OF THEIR DEAN (TORRIJOS' SISTER-IN-LAW, SUSANA RICHAS DE TORRIJOS), BUT SLUNG LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PERSONAL INSULTS AT HER AS WELL. STUDENTS THEN DECLARED A STRIKE, LOCKED OUT STUDENTS AND TEACHERS AND CLOSED DOWN THE FACULTY FOR 48 HOURS.

5. COMMENT: THE CATIVA DEMONSTRATION RATES AS THE MOST SERIOUS STUDENT ACTION SINCE LAST SEPTEMBER. PARTICULARLY WITH THE ECONOMY OF COLON SO BLEAK, GN AND GOP AUTHORITIES APPEAR TO TAKE STUDENT ACTIONS THERE SERIOUSLY, AS WELL THEY SHOULD. ONE MEASURE OF CONCERN IS THE NEAR-COMPLETE ABSENCE OF MEDIA REPORTING ON THE VIOLENCE.

6. AT THE UNIVERSITY, STUDENT LEADERS SEEM FOR THE MOMENT TO BE MOST INTERESTED IN UTILIZING SIMPLE AND PALPABLE PROBLEMS FOR STUDENT ORGANIZING. STUDENT POLITICAL GROUPS COMPETE FOR FIRST PLACE IN DAMNING THE UNIVERSITY AND EDUCATION MINISTRY ESTABLISHMENT. THE ISSUES ARE HENCE OF LESS MOMENT THAN THE RISE IN POLITICAL TEMPERATURE THESE PROTESTS SEEK TO EFFECT.

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## Message Attributes

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